

Weekly News

CLASSROOM READY • WEEK 3 2010 • LEVEL 2

Cuba Readies for Change

For more than 50 years, Cuba has been a defender of true communism. But with the announcement of changes in the way the country employs its workers, this could be changing.

The government plans to get rid of 500,000 government workers. This is nearly 10 percent of the country's total labour force of 5.1 million workers. As well, the government said that it plans to reduce restrictions on private enterprise.

"Private" business used to be a bad word in Cuba. As a communist state, Cuba has followed a political, social, and economic system where there is no private ownership of businesses or land. Everything is owned "communally", i.e., by the people—and everything is run by the government. The goal of communism is to create a society where everyone is treated equally. It was created as a way to solve

problems in **capitalism**, like poverty and the gap between rich and poor.

In practice, communism has its own problems. It is seen by many as an inefficient system because there is no motivation for business **innovation** or for workers to work hard. As well, in Cuba, the government has tried to keep everyone employed, even when this has resulted in government businesses employing people with little or nothing to do. The Cuban Workers Confederation, the country's only union, recently stated that it supports the layoffs because Cuba can no longer support "bad habits" among workers that are hurting Cuba's economy.

The layoff of 500,000 workers will start right away and continue through April 2011. It will be a challenging time for many workers who for decades have relied on the government to provide them with everything—jobs, free education and health care, and inexpensive housing, transportation, and basic food.

The government hopes that these workers can be absorbed by a growing private sector. It has begun experimenting with capitalism by allowing private-run barbershops and taxis, and small private farms. It is expected to expand these opportunities by handing out permits that will allow people to work for themselves as repairmen, gardeners, hairdressers, and massage therapists.

Some Cubans support the changes, believing that a bit of capitalism will help fix an inefficient economic system. Others worry whether they will be able to find jobs in Cuba's changing economy.

Did You Know?

The ideals behind communism were first developed by Karl Marx in the 1800s, and led to revolutions in Russia and China in the first half of the 20th century. Russia has since disbanded most of its communist system, and China has also made big changes. ★

Capitalism: An economic system based on private ownership. Our own system is capitalist.

Innovation: A new way of doing something.

Weekly News Q & A

Cuba Readies for Change

1. What employment changes has the Cuban government announced?

2. What changes is the government making in the way business operates?

3. Why are these changes necessary?

4. How did Cubans benefit under the old system?

5. How has the union reacted to the news of the layoffs? Why is this surprising?

Critical Thinking

1. Explain the difference between capitalism and communism. What are some problems and benefits of each system?

2. Write a short paragraph explaining how a laid-off Cuban worker might be feeling.

Map Activity: Cuba

1. Locate and label the following countries:

CUBA	HAITI	THE BAHAMAS
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	UNITED STATES	MEXICO
VENEZUELA	CAYMAN ISLANDS	JAMAICA
COLOMBIA	PUERTO RICO	
TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS		

2. Locate and label the following cities:

Havana	Kingston	Port-au-Prince
Santo Domingo	Nassau	George Town
San Juan		

3. Locate and label the following bodies of salt water:

Atlantic Ocean
Gulf of Mexico
Caribbean Sea

4. Create a colour legend for your map with the following:

Cuba
Other Countries
Salt Water

5. Draw and label the compass bearing.

6. Label your map:

Cuba and Neighbouring Countries

Map Activity



Word Power

Using the words below, fill in the blanks in the following sentences. All of the words have been used in the article.

1. It will take some time to put his plan into _____.
2. If you are _____ while painting, we may have to buy some more paint.
3. The dog _____ on its owner to bring it food and water.
4. Jim and Nancy were both _____ qualified for the position.
5. Sometimes I need some _____ to get a job done.

communally, defender, economic, employs, equally, inefficient, motivation, practice, reduce, relied, restrictions, social, society, union

Quiz

Cuba Readies for Change

1. The layoff of 50,000 workers will start right away and continue through April 2011.
True False
2. The Cuban Workers Confederation recently stated that it supports the layoffs.
True False
3. For more than 50 years, Cuba has been a defender of true _____.
4. It will be a challenging time for many workers who for decades have relied on the _____ to provide them with everything.
5. The government has begun experimenting with _____ by allowing private-run barbershops and taxis, and small private farms.

Weekly News Answer Key

Cuba Readies for Change

1. What employment changes has the Cuban government announced?

It has announced it will lay off 500,000 government employees, almost 10 percent of the workforce.

2. What changes is the government making in the way business operates?

The Cuban government says it will reduce restrictions on private enterprise. It has already begun to encourage private-run barbershops and taxis, and small private farms, and is expected to expand these opportunities by handing out permits that will allow people to work for themselves as repairmen, gardeners, hairdressers, and massage therapists.

3. Why are these changes necessary?

The old system had led to laziness. Because the government supplied all essential needs either free or very cheaply, there was no motivation to work hard. As a result the Cuban economy has stagnated for half a century. The government was committed to everyone having a job, so there was no motivation to do a good job, since you would have a job anyway.

4. How did Cubans benefit under the old system?

Their basic needs were met with very little effort on their part. They received government jobs, free education and health care, and inexpensive housing, transportation, and basic food. On the other hand, most Cubans are very poor. Their jobs pay little, so they can't buy any extras.

5. How has the union reacted to the news of the layoffs? Why is this surprising?

The country's only union supports the layoffs because it says Cuba can no longer support "bad habits" among workers that are hurting Cuba's economy. It is surprising because unions generally are bitterly opposed to layoffs—their job is to protect workers and their jobs. But in this case the union is looking at a bigger picture and perhaps seeing more opportunity for workers under a revamped system.

Word Power

1. practice
2. inefficient
3. relied
4. equally
5. motivation

Quiz

1. The layoff of 50,000 workers will start right away and continue through April 2011.

False. 500,000.

2. The Cuban Workers Confederation recently stated that it supports the layoffs.

True

3. For more than 50 years, Cuba has been a defender of true **communism**.

4. It will be a challenging time for many workers who for decades have relied on the **government** to provide them with everything.

5. The government has begun experimenting with **capitalism** by allowing private-run barbershops and taxis, and small private farms.

Map Activity Answer Key

